

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2008: EVENING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 145:1,5

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 33:1

Confession of faith: Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy catholic* Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 38:1, 17

Law

Psalm: 38:1, 17

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 66:1

Scripture reading: Habakkuk 1:1 – 2:4

Scripture text: Habakkuk 1:13

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours A person more righteous than he? (Habakkuk 1:13)

It is Christmas time.

The time we commemorate the coming of the Lord Jesus to our world.

- Let us thus remember that this was in aid of us missing the fury of the forces of Satan, because we, who are sinners, through the blood of our Lord Jesus, have been saved so that we may live for eternity.

Let us consider the following matters from the passage we have read together:

- 1. Habakkuk sees the judgement.**
- 2. Habakkuk prays for mercy.**
- 3. The Lord answers Habakkuk.**

1. Habakkuk sees the judgement.

Somewhere on the city wall was a quiet observation post where Habakkuk retired to pray and have communion with the Lord. From here he was able to see what took place outside as well as inside the city.

One day something else than the ordinary started happening. Every day the Lord repeatedly gave him the same vision.

Actually it was two visions.

- To the outside the Lord showed him the Chaldeans attacking the city and exterminating the people.

In this vision he saw tremendous cruelty taking place.

- On the one hand this cruelty was something that still had to take place – it pointed to the last assault of the Chaldeans on Jerusalem, finally taking over Jerusalem.
- But it also was retroactive as Habakkuk well remembered the cruelty of the Chaldeans when they conquered the first group of Jude, expatriating them to Babel.

Habakkuk received the mercy of understanding why the Lord would be sending these cruel Chaldeans.

- This happened because the Lord revealed to him what was taking place amongst the people of Jude.

From where he was sitting at the observation post he looked down into the city and the Lord revealed to him the corruptness of his fellow citizens.

- They were arguing and fighting, committing all kinds of violence.
- The law had lost its power – meaning that they no longer served the Lord – because here the *law* is referring to the commandments of the Lord.
- Because their unbelief was also showing in their daily lives, nothing of honest judgement took place amongst the people.

Habakkuk experienced this so badly that he confessed to the Lord that the heathen surrounded his people, who were supposed to be just.

- His people were just as devoid of God than the heathen, who in his vision, he saw invading his people.
- Thus the problem was exterior as well as interior.

These visions continued for quite a time and constantly Habakkuk was praying to the Lord for help.

- He wrote that he even shouted: Violence!
- He wanted the Lord to prevent the enemy from attacking his people.
- Surely he also wanted his people to come to conversion.

But the Lord did not help him.

- In the onset the Lord did not cheer up Habakkuk.
- All the Lord said was that Habakkuk has to look and see, when this vision goes into fulfilment, he would really be astounded and dumbfounded.
- It will be so bad that eyewitnesses, relating what happened, would not be believed at all.
- Thereby the Lord Himself confirmed how cruel the army of the Chaldeans would be.

In our times we often hear people saying that bad people (or nations) are devoid of the council of God!

- But here in verse 6 the Lord is clearly teaching that *He Himself is raising the Chaldeans* in attacking nations – amongst them, also Jude.
- Because they are improperly worshipping Him and have become socially as bad as the heathen, He is using the Chaldeans to punish His people.

Still, should you pay close attention, there is mercy!

- The Lord does not love the enemy.
- Because they did not punish the other nations only for their disbelief, the Lord is taking exception to them.
- In their violence they worshipped their own conceitedness.

In verse 11 it is written:

Then he sweeps by like the wind, and goes on. He is indeed guilty, whose strength is his god. (Habakkuk 1:11 World English)

The norm of the Chaldeans was their own authority.

- By their self-elevation and own judgement they elevated themselves over the other nations, but also tried doing so against the Lord.
- In this way a person using violence as his weapon is seen by the Lord.
- Eventually, in the eyes of the Lord, the Chaldeans stand guilty.

2. Habakkuk prays for mercy.

Habakkuk continued praying for mercy.

- He asked the Lord whether, prior to creation, He was not already God. (Verse 12)
- It is remarkable that he had exactly the same in mind as Paul in Ephesians 1, namely that prior to creation, the Lord already knew and planned whom He would redeem.
- In the light of this Habakkuk is asking the Lord not to let his people die.

He, in representing his people, is praying that the disaster as revealed by the Lord should, because they are the children of the Lord, not come down on them.

- Note the closeness of the relationship Habakkuk is experiencing with the Lord:
Are You not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction.
 (Habakkuk 1:12)

“O Lord my God, my Holy One.”

- Because the Lord does not approve of unholiness, the holiness of the Lord, to the sinner, is a cause for fear.
- This is exactly what Habakkuk is trying to circumvent, he does not mention the unholiness of the people – he is presenting them as the children of God!

Now Habakkuk starts complaining about the Chaldeans.

- He knows that, due to all the sin of Jude, the Lord has determined them as a “judgement” and “correction” to Jude.
- With this, because he understands it, he has no problem and through the revelation of the Lord he is seeing the unjust deeds committed by his people in the city.

But Habakkuk is not satisfied about the Chaldeans exceeding the order, given by the Lord to them.

- Not only do they punish, but in his eyes, they also are destroying everything in their vicinity - even the children of God.
- There is a clear difference between punishment and destruction.

With frankness Habakkuk is telling all he knows about the general conduct of the Chaldeans when at war with other nations, adding to this also the matters revealed to him by the Lord.

- These people gather humans like a fisherman pulling his net through the water and then dragging the caught fish to the shore.
- Then they offer for themselves and worship what they robbed from other people.

In his prayer he is telling the Lord exactly how bad the Chaldeans are – but in the back of his mind he has the idea that his people at least are not quite as bad as this bunch of heathens.

- Therefore he is asking the Lord why He is only observing whilst the Chaldeans are devouring people, more just than themselves.

The question to be answered is: Is in fact, Jude really more just than the Chaldeans?

- Will the Lord protect you just because you are only in name His people, but in reality you do not believe any more or worship the Lord as you like?

3. The Lord answers Habakkuk.

Habakkuk then returned to the watchtower where he always prayed and where the Lord let him see all these things.

- Then as previously, the Lord gave him the same answer.
- The Lord is not going to prevent this judgement – indeed, with a godly certainty, it will come to pass.

The Lord issued an extra command, namely that Habakkuk must record these revelations on clay tablets and in order for it to be read, place it where many people pass by.

- In depth this was a command by the Lord causing Habakkuk to realise that the people were not interested in conversion.
- They will be reading about all these matters but will do nothing about it.

The Lord is pointing out that the people of Jude are just as devoid of faith as the Chaldeans advancing from the hills.

- Further the Lord is making clear that he will not judge you by all the titles behind your name, but by the relationship between you and Him.

- By what you make of your faith and worship – by matters such as conversion and repentance.

In the mercy of the Lord these people were very rich.

- In fact Habakkuk is pointing out to the Lord that they are a chosen nation - the children of the covenant of the Lord.
- Still the Lord answers that unless you appropriate His mercy for yourself, all this will be of no avail.
- Nobody whose soul is inflated is in the right. Only the just will live by the faith.

Chapter 2:4 actually answers the problem of Habakkuk.

- In judgement it does not matter whether you are a Chaldean or from Jude.
- The just, no matter who it is, will live by the faith.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, quoted the words and again underlined it.

- The Holy Spirit caused him to record the revelation of the Lord in clearer terms than here: The faith deals with the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:16, 17).
For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16, 17)

For ourselves we have to gather all these points together.

- What do we do about the sin of others, our own sin and the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Is this message to Habakkuk one of mercy or judgement?

- Both.
- The judgement entails that every unbeliever or person living in unbelief will collide with the judgement of the Lord.

The fact that you are a member of a church or whether you are a heathen does not necessarily determine your position in the Lord's judgement over you.

- The just lives by his faith.
- This means that the unbelievers (in the passage we have read they are the Chaldeans) at any rate are judged by the Lord to everlasting doom.

At the same time there is a division amongst the believers:

- The reckless amongst them go, together with the unbelievers, to eternal doom.
- Still there is a portion that is saved – those who continue in the faith.

They are the proof of the boundlessness of the mercy of God.

- During their lives they also commit wrong deeds.
- At least they were also part of the people guilty of committing large-scale corruption – as Habakkuk confesses.
- But they did not start worshipping themselves and denying the existence of the Lord as their God.
- These people were still willing to come to conversion.

For them the Lord made provision. Here the Lord is referring to the question put by Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:12) when Habakkuk questioningly told the Lord that they at least will not die.

Are You not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction.

(Habakkuk 1:12 MKJV)

Aren't you from everlasting, Yahweh my God, my Holy One? We will not die. Yahweh, you have appointed him for judgment. You, Rock, have established him to punish.

(Habakkuk 1:12 World English)

Now the Lord is answering that He, in His judgement, is absolving the just in such a way that they themselves will not be punished for it. They are living, but they are living only through their faith.

From the book of Habakkuk the workings of the faith-matter is not so clear, but in the New Testament it becomes completely clear.

- This faith is faith in the redemption granted, through the Lord Jesus Christ, by God the Father.
- It is to be reconciled to the wrath of God.
- But at the same time it is to be freed from the punishment of God over you as a person because Jesus Christ, your redeemer, suffered the punishment in your place.

Added to this is the freeing, by the workings of the Holy Spirit, from the bondage of sin.

- In practice it means that we will not like the people of Jude, read on a clay tablet the judgement of the Lord, and then carry on as if nothing has happened.
- We will have to realise that we are committing sin and we will have to actively convert ourselves from it.

It is now Christmas time.

- The time during which we commemorate the coming of the Lord Jesus to our world.
- Let us thus commemorate that this was in aid of the powers of Satan missing us and that because the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ has saved us who are sinners, we may have eternal life.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 146:1, 8

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

Dr MJ Du Plessis
Reformed Church Bellville
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Scripture: MKJV